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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

16 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: A Kosygin Meeting with the President

Why a Soviet Request to Meet?

1. There are three possible reasons why the Soviets may wish a meeting with the President. Moscow may regard it as a necessary gesture on the ground that for Kosygin not to see the President on a visit to New York would be taken as a discourtesy likely to heighten tensions needlessly. If this is the only motive, the meeting would probably be perfunctory and produce no significant exchange. Secondly, the Soviets may intend it simply as a means of heightening the drama of their performance on behalf of the Arabs in the UN, permitting them to say that they pressed the case against Israel at the highest level of the US Government. In this case, too, the encounter would probably develop nothing new or surprising. Finally, Kosygin may intend to talk seriously to the President about the Middle East and other matters.

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2. On the whole, this last explanation seems the most plausible, though obviously it could be mixed with the others. Probably the Soviets feel that the Middle East crisis, added to the war in Vietnam, has brought the world situation as a whole to a point of complexity and danger which requires contact at the highest level. Moreover, their own position in the Arab world, though not so badly damaged as ours, is a parlous one. Their chances of retrieving enough from the debacle to make the Arabs grateful for their support depend to a great extent on forcing Israeli concessions which Israel is in no mood to make. The Soviets probably think that the US is the only power that could persuade the Israelis to give up enough to minimize Arab losses -- though they probably overestimate US leverage over the Israelis in this situation. Altogether, it may be one of those infrequent occasions when, as the Soviets view it, what is at stake gives the two biggest powers an interest in direct dealings at the top.

Kosygin's Probable Line on the Middle East Crisis

3. Kosygin will not feel that he is speaking from weakness, and certainly his demeanor will not indicate this. While he may think that the Soviet position in the Arab world may be very

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awkward, he probably sees that of the US as far worse. Kosygin will probably assume that the basis for dealing lies in the influence each power can exercise on its respective clients. The Soviets will want the US to exert pressure on Israel to limit the latter's gains at Arab expense. They will assume that the US wants to preserve its interests in the Arab countries and move toward restoring normal relations, matters on which the Soviets could be helpful.

4. An approach on this basis would call for some subtle and complicated bargaining and would seem to exclude two alternative lines, both more simple and direct, which Kosygin might conceivably take. One would be to threaten military action against the Israeli to compel their withdrawal from Arab territory; this the Soviets would almost certainly consider too risky, as evidently they did throughout the crisis. (We interpret the first Kosygin message of June 10 to mean, at most, that the Soviets might have moved forces to Syria to deter an Israeli assault on Damascus.) The other alternative would be a genuine offer of cooperation with the US to restore order to the area; this would be incompatible with everything the Soviets have worked for there, and indeed, contrary to the general line of their policy everywhere. And they

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give no sign of believing that the dangers are so great as to justify the political risks they would see in such a course.

5. We would expect Kosygin's opening gambit to run somewhat as follows: The Soviets are deeply concerned about the dangerous new increase in tension, already high because of Vietnam, which has now been brought on by the Middle East war. They are convinced that this development is owing to the policies of the US, which have become increasingly aggressive. They must warn that if things go on in this way there will be grave danger of a catastrophic war. It is urgent first of all to put out the fire in the Middle East. The Arabs will not begin to think of peace until the Israelis withdraw from Arab territories. The US must demand of Israel that she withdraw, and then the way will be open to negotiations.

6. When pressed to get down to cases, Kosygin will probably concede nothing on territorial adjustments in Israel's favor, but he will probably be willing to talk about a formula for assured access to the Gulf of Aqaba. His preference would probably be for a UN declaration, but he might agree to the return of UN forces, or say that he was willing to discuss this with Nasser. He would

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probably not agree to a joint US-USSR guarantee or a collective guarantee with other powers. He will probably not be willing to put pressure on Egypt to open the Suez Canal to Israel.

7. On broader and more fundamental Middle East issues he will probably not be forthcoming. He will probably not agree to use Soviet influence on the Arabs to move toward acceptance of Israel's existence and the establishment of normal relations with her. He will not be responsive to the idea of a US-USSR agreement to limit arms supply to the region. At most, he might offer to assist the US to reestablish relations with the Arab states when passions have cooled. (It is possible, in fact, that the Soviets wish to see a restoration of Arab relations with the US and UK before too long, if only to avoid Egyptian demands for economic assistance arising from the rupture of normal trade and financial relations.)

8. If something like the above is Kosygin's brief, the net of it will be that little room for maneuver is offered, and that his primary concern will be to impress on the President that the only way forward is for the US to make the Israelis "come to their senses." There are other compelling reasons for thinking that Kosygin will be as inflexible as this. The main Soviet purpose

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at this phase of the Middle East crisis is to preserve the USSR's standing with the Arabs; any suggestion now that the Soviets were talking compromises with the US would be fatal to this aim. Similarly, evidence of Soviet-American collaboration would provide the Chinese with a propaganda field day and would have a deeply disturbing effect in Hanoi. Finally, it seems doubtful from what we know of the Moscow collective leadership's mode of operation that it would have been able at this stage to provide Kosygin with any very flexible instructions.

9. Probably he was told to make a probe of US intentions, to test the President's mettle with some tough talk, to see how worried the Americans were over the threat to their oil interests, to measure their willingness to apply pressure to Israel, and perhaps to lay the basis for continuing contacts at a lower level. If the Soviets wish to develop a parley, they could be thinking of leaving Foreign Minister Gromyko in New York for a round of talks with Secretary Rusk. Alternatively, the Four Power approach might now interest them. Kosygin's Paris stop en route may be for the purpose of exploring this possibility. If they thought that de Gaulle would be a reliable collaborator, the Four Power device might seem to offer advantages. Yet they would probably think

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that they could not count on France, and, moreover, that the greater formality of Four Power talks smacked too much of a deliberate effort to seek a compromise, which would intensify Arab suspicions. If an agreement to continue private contacts comes out of the Summit, probably the Soviets would prefer them at the ministerial level and in the UN setting.

How Will Vietnam Figure?

10. It is possible, but we think unlikely, that Kosygin will leave it to the President to initiate discussion of Vietnam. Probably he will embrace it in a general indictment of American policy, charging that the US there, as in the Middle East and elsewhere, is recklessly increasing the likelihood of a direct clash with the USSR. He will declare that it is necessary and possible to turn down the violence in Vietnam and move toward peace.

11. But Kosygin is unlikely to have any new formula to offer. Probably he will repeat Hanoi's proposition which governed his negotiations in London in February: there can be talks if the bombing of North Vietnam is stopped. He may believe that if he says this with great emphasis directly to the President it will have more effect than it has had through intermediaries. He

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probably will not be in a position to say that Hanoi would take any particular reciprocal action if bombing stopped, but he might offer his personal assurance that some favorable development would occur soon thereafter. He probably will not say, or even imply, that Soviet pressure on Hanoi to move toward peace could be had in exchange for US pressure on Israel, but he will probably indicate in a general way that moves to end tensions in both crisis areas would greatly brighten the outlook for Soviet-American relations and that the USSR would welcome that.

12. It is possible, of course, that some shift in Hanoi's attitude has lately occurred, and even that Kosygin's journey is prompted more by the Vietnam problem than by the Middle East crisis. Surely Moscow will have taken a new reading in Hanoi on the eve of the trip. But there has been little sign in Hanoi's recent utterances, or in the action on the battlefield, that any change of policy or tactics was impending.

On the Other Hand

13. We, of course, have no direct evidence on what the Soviet leadership has in mind in connection with Kosygin's visit. The foregoing quite gloomy prognosis is construed from what we

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know of recent Soviet conduct and attitudes. It is conceivable that Soviet views have undergone some traumatic change, perhaps under the influence of misjudgments and unexpected setbacks in the Middle East crisis. Possibly the Soviets think that two arenas of crisis going at once, both with a potential for further escalation, strain the fabric of peace too much. They might imagine that the Chinese could in such circumstances get carried away, and do something foolishly dangerous.

14. Should the Soviet leaders have had such thoughts in recent days, they might conclude that it was the better part of wisdom to make some significant move toward reducing tensions, even at some political cost. It would be characteristic that they would try to place all the disturbing developments of recent months, mostly unrelated though they are, into some systematic pattern, and then draw a comprehensive conclusion for the "general line" of their policy. The result might be a decision to trim sail on the more dangerous issues and to set out on a new tack, presumably toward safer waters.

15. There is to our knowledge no basis whatever for believing that anything of the sort is happening. But as an alternative hypothesis to keep in mind it seems worth setting down, precisely

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because we know so little of the impact of recent events on the Soviet leaders. Should they decide to make a significant turning in their policy, moreover, they would not reveal this all at once. Kosygin will probably expect to review the whole gamut of problems currently on the Soviet-American docket. On one or another of them, perhaps on one unrelated to the two major crisis areas, he might disclose a shift which signaled a new direction for Soviet policy in general. But again, this seems very much an outside chance and the scenario for the meeting described in the preceding sections much the more likely.

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SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

Participated in by OCT and has the
concurrence of [REDACTED]
We tried, without success, to have a
representative from Dave Murphy's Division.

SHERMAN KENT
Director
National Estimates

16 June 1967
(DATE)

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FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

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